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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the views of three critics of higher education in America, chosen to represent the conservative, centrist, and liberal points of view. The critics are Russell Kirk (conservative), Robert Maynard Hutchins (middle ground), and Harold Taylor (liberal); and their views are presented within the framework of six concepts: (1) outlook toward man, (2) curriculum, (3) stance toward control of one's education, (4) who should have an education, (5) use or non-use of science, and (6) process. Outlook toward man ranges from "perfectibility" (students can make their own academic decisions) to "depraved" (students must be kept in line through discipline). Curriculum is viewed in a range from liberalizing to utilitarian types of courses. The control of one's education is argued from the notions of prescriptive versus free elective. The use or non-use of science in education is argued within the context of the behavioristic versus humanistic controversy, while the question of who should have an education is part of the elitist-democratic continuum considered by all critics of higher education. The final concept to be analyzed is process, that is, rationalism (in which decisions are made to conform to postulated truths) versus instrumentalism (which views the individual as the criterion for decision and process as more important than substance). Contains 16 references. (GLR)

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A COMPARISON OF THREE CRITICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

SPECIALIZATION PAPER

EMERGENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
IN AMERICA

SEMINAR

by

Cassandra Todd Carraway

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
OVERVIEW.	1
EXAMINATION OF THE FRAMEWORK.	2
ROBERT MAYNARD HUTCHINS	5
HAROLD TAYLOR	8
RUSSELL KIRK.	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	15

OVERVIEW

In the nineteenth century in America, the central educational battle was fought over the elective system (Brubaker and Rudy, 1958).

Involved in this battle was a number of related issues, with a great deal of significance attached to them. The central issue was whether the American College should remain primarily religious in orientation, with training for Christian piety and a broad liberal culture, or should the American college become secular, serving the interests of utilitarianism, social efficiency, and scholarly research? There were many other questions tied closely to the above issues:

> Should American higher education follow the ideal of the German university or the English college? Which was valid, the old "faculty psychology" or the new "experimental psychology?" Was there such a thing as a "mental discipline" and could one devise a college curriculum that would develop it? Should higher education be "practical" or "liberal," a means to an end or an end in itself? Were the "new" studies (such as science) more important than the "old" studies (such as the classics)? Should the college aim to be aristocratic, and training the elite, or should it seek to attain a democratic all-inclusiveness? On the answers to these questions depended the future of American higher education; and the battle over the elective system touched, in one way or another, on every one of them (Brubaker and Rudy, 1958).

In the nineteenth century in America, the Central educational battle was fought over the elective system (Brubaker and Rudy, 1958).

The stance toward control of one's education was viewed as a curricular issue of perceptive versus free elective.

> ...free election is the only standard consistent with their notions of developmental psychology, while only precrition can ensure that students assimilate fundamental intellectual and liberal values (Kintzer, 1984:102).

Another important issue discussed by the critics of higher education is the question, who should have an education?

> The elitist-democratic continuum is certainly a factor considered by all critics of higher education (Kintzer, 1984:02).

In other words, is the education in America only for a selected group, or should education be available for all groups?

Another concept that is viewed and analyzed by the critics is the behavioristic versus the humanistic controversy, that is, the use or non-use of science in education.

The final concept of this framework deals with process: rationalism versus instrumentalism.

> Instrumentalism views the individual as the criterion for decision and process more important than substance. Rationalism proceeds from postulated truth and decides issues according to conformity to such truth, while neo-humanism is an eclectic blending of the two extremes (Kintzer, 1984:103-104).

EXAMINATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

Before discussing the contribution of the selected critics of higher education, a framework containing the following points will be examined:

1. Outlook toward man.
2. Curriculum.
3. Stance toward control of one's education.
4. Who should have an education.
5. Use or non-use of science.
6. Process.

One of the most fundamental themes throughout the critical literature is the conception of human nature held by the critics of higher education. They range from the outlook toward man as "perfectibility" to the other extreme of viewing man as "depraved" (Kintzer, 1984).

> If man is essentially good, students can be left to their own curricular devices and allowed to make their own academic decisions...At the other extreme is the belief that depraved man is best kept in line through discipline, the precepts of a harsh God, and a prescribed curriculum of considerable difficulty (Kintzer, 1984:100-101).

The curriculum is also viewed differently by the critics of higher education as being liberalizing or utilitarian.

> To those who see the institution as being a servant of society (Utilitarian)...the curriculum ought properly to contain much of significance for the various vocations... This view contrasts strongly with the notion that only liberalizing courses should be included in the undergraduate curriculum and that training for vocations can best be done elsewhere...(Kintzer, 1984:101-102).

Framework of Philosophical Extremes

The following critics of higher education in America were chosen to represent conservative, middle ground, and liberal viewpoints: Russell Kirk representing the conservative field, Robert Hutchins somewhat in the middle ground, and Harold Taylor with his liberal viewpoints.

The philosophical extremes of the above critics will be examined according to the six concepts discussed in this paper.

Where information is inadequate in terms of a discussion of each point in the framework in classifying a critic, this will be noted in the paper.

ROBERT MAYNARD HUTCHINS 1899-1977

Hutchins was an educator and administrator whose influence in higher education and in public affairs reached far beyond the institution that he directed. He consistently expressed his concern with the tasks of discovering what a good society is and how to make one. He vigorously defended academic freedom, and leading opposition to faculty loyalty oaths in the 1950s.

His Chicago Plan for undergraduates encouraged liberal education. He introduced the study of the Great Books at various levels in the university. He deplored undue emphasis on non-academic pursuits, and deplored the tendency of United States educational institutions to drift toward specialization, vocationalism, and pragmatism.

Hutchins founded the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara, California in 1959. The Center was an attempt to approach Hutchins ideal of a "community of scholars" engaged in serious dialogue on paramount issues. It dealt with a wide range of topics, individual freedom, international order, ecological imperatives, the rights of minorities and of women, and questions about what is a good life, among other topics (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1979).

Hutchins' view toward man:

> The nature of man indicates that he can continue to learn all his life; the scientific evidence shows

that he has capacity to do so (Hutchins, 1968:130).

> ...Men are rational, moral, and spiritual beings and that the improvement of men means the fullest development of their rational, moral, and spiritual powers. All men have these powers, and all men should develop them to the fullest extent (Hutchins, 1953:68).

Hutchins' view on curriculum:

> This is an education appropriate to free men. It is liberal education... A liberal education aims to develop the powers of understanding and judgment... Liberal education consists of training in the liberal arts and of understanding the leading ideas that have animated mankind. It aims to help the human being learn to think for himself, to develop his highest human powers (Hutchins, 1953:83).

Hutchins' stance toward control of one's education:

> The liberally educated man must know how to read, write, and figure. He must know and understand the leading ideas that have animated mankind. He must comprehend the tradition in which he lives. He must be able to communicate with his fellowmen. Through familiarity with the best models he must have constantly before him that habitual vision of greatness without which, any true education is impossible. The process of such an education should be dialectical. The liberally educated man should be able to continue the Great Conservations that began in the dawn of history, that goes on at the present day, and that is best exemplified by the Socratic dialogue (Hutchins, 1953:95-96).

Hutchins' view on who should have an education:

> ...everybody must be educated. This does not mean that everybody must be educated at the same rate or in the same way or to the same extent (Hutchins, 1968:102).

Hutchins' view on the use of non-use of science:

> The object of liberal education for all is not to make young people scientists or mathematicians or engineers, but to help them to grasp whatever everybody ought to know about science, mathematics, and engineering (Hutchins, 1968:98).

Hutchins' view on process was a more classic rationalism, more like that of Aristotle, which glorified the life of the mind as the good life. Instead of seeking merely the formal discipline of human faculties, as in the formal study of Latin and Greek grammar, he sought to steep them in the content of the liberal arts - the "wisdom of the ages and the great books." Here lay the great storehouse of rational principles undergirding the universe which but waited to be grasped by the rational insight of the student (Hutchins, 1968).

Any idea that all the subjects in the array from aesthetics to zoology were all of equal intellectual worth was repugnant to Hutchins. On the contrary, it was the concepts of the vast storehouse of human learning arranged in a hierarchy based on the ability to bring out the human in man (Brubaker and Rudy, 1976:295).

Robert Hutchins was found to be a little liberal, somewhat middle ground, but primarily conservative. In terms of the framework, he was found to ascribe to the following concepts: in the middle between elitist and democratic, in the middle between behaviorist and humanistic, and viewed curriculum as liberalizing and was a more classic rationalist.

HAROLD TAYLOR

Taylor once classified educational philosophies as rational - exemplified by some Roman Catholic institutions; neo-humanism - a position favored by the majority of liberal arts colleges; and instrumentalist - suggested by Sarah Lawrence College (Mayhew, 1969:124).

Taylor represents a contemporary point of view:

> The institutions of education must make an effort to reach the aesthetic needs of the citizens without making the usual distinctions made by Europeans and by many others who are interested in the arts between culture for the masses and culture for the rest of us. It is not necessary to produce mass art and mass ideas merely because more and more people are interested... The university is the exact place for the exploration of the new; and for the development of forms of art of the kind which can break down the distinctions of snobbery, along with the possibility of the inverse snobbery of the avant-garde (Taylor, 1962:194).

Taylor's view toward man:

> A philosophy which is adequate for education as for life will take account of these values and locate them in their setting in contemporary reality. It will assert the belief that human nature is not static, and that human life is what we make it. It will deny that superstition is sinful, and affirm the fact that the causes of his fall from grace are in some sense discoverable and to some degree correctable. It will recognize the value of each person...and will call for protection and support of those who have not the power to protect and support themselves (Taylor, 1950:443-444).

Taylor's view on curriculum:

> The intellectual life of the student must not be buttoned up in a tight curriculum. The choice among courses of study must be directly related to the ability, interests, and purposes of the individual, with the aid of teachers who can give guidance in the

making of choices (Taylor, 1950:442).

Taylor's stance toward control on one's education:

> Remove all subject matter requirements for graduation and arrange instead for each student to choose his own teachers and courses and to plan a year to year curriculum of his own... The reason for removing the requirements is not to make things easier for the student by allowing him to avoid "hard" courses. It is to get him directly involved in his own education and to make the faculty members more responsible to students for the quality and content of the teaching they have to offer... Another reason for freeing the student from requirements is that no one learns anything seriously and well unless he commits himself to it, sees the reason for it, and has a stake in what he is learning (Taylor, 1971:76-77).

The following is Taylor's view on the aim of a modern education:

> The distinctive aim of a modern education is to create in youth such a deep attachment to humane moral values that the life of each becomes intuitively liberal and the action of each constantly helpful to the total community of human interests. Our unique responsibility as philosophers of education or as teachers is to be educational pioneers, working steadily at the outer edge of intellectual and social advance. Our particular hope is to make in each of our college communities a model of what life can be in a happy, free, and useful human society (Taylor, 1950:446).

Taylor's view on who should have an education:

> We are urged forward by a democratic impulse to give everyone the education to which his talents entitle him, but have adopted ways of doing it which concentrate on administrative efficiency rather than on educational quality (Taylor, 1950:214).

Taylor's view on the use or non-use of science:

> The young who graduate from college are for the most part eager, anxious to do what is right, and usually unable to present anything very employable to an employer. In a technical aspect, most useful pieces of knowledge do little to educate the student liberally. Yet we should not therefore conclude that the things

> which are useful, either for getting things done, or for increasing technical skill, have no liberal values in them. In college education, ability to state one's own position about American foreign policy is one aspect of a technical or vocational skill. The other skills necessary for fulfilling the purposes and functions of life in America can be taught without interfering with the ultimate humanism to which the college must be devoted (Taylor, 1950: 21).

Harold Taylor was found to have a liberal view on higher education. In terms of the framework, he was found to ascribe to the following concepts: perfectibility, utilitarian, free elective, democratic, humanistic, and instrumentalism.

RUSSELL KIRK

Kirk has written much about tendencies in American education. He represents a conservative point of view on higher education.

Kirk's view toward man:

> A college, however diligent, cannot turn a young man of bad inclination and habits into a child of light (Kirk, 1978:33).

Kirk's view on curriculum:

> For I think that the particular conditions of our century and our society demand now, more than ever before, a restoration of liberal learning. The hour is favorable to the colleges, if only the people who control college policy can perceive their present opportunity (Kirk, 1965:51).

> The college should return to concise curriculum emphasizing classical literature, languages, moral philosophy, history, the pure sciences, logic, rhetoric, and religious knowledge (Kirk, 1965:57).

Kirk's stance toward control of one's education and on who should have an education:

> Fallacy I is the notion that the principle function of college and universities - if not the only really justifiable function - is to promote utilitarian efficiency (Kirk, 1965:xiv).

> But actually, I am an anti-elitist... I object especially to schemes for the governance of modern society by formally-trained specialized and technological elites. One of my principal criticisms of current tendencies in higher learning is that, despite much cant about democratic university and college, really our educational apparatus has been raising up not a class of liberally educated young people of humane outlook, but rather a series of degree-dignified elites, and alleged "meritocracy" of confined views and dubious intellectual and moral credentials, afflicted by presumption, puffed up by that little learning which is a dangerous thing (Kirk, 1965:xvii).

6. The college should abandon its attempt to encroach upon the specialized and professional studies which are the proper province of the graduate schools of universities.

7. The college should say less about "socialization" and "personality-building" and more about the improvement of the human reason, for the human reason's own sake.

8. The smaller college should give up as lost endeavor its aspiration to attract those students who desire the "extra-curricular activities"... and offer instead its own natural advantages of personal relationships, smallness of scale, and respect for individuality.

9. The college should not content itself with enrolling those students who cannot obtain admittance to a great university or state college.

10. The college should endeavor deliberately to keep its student body within reasonable limits, its humane scale being one of its principle natural advantages over Behemoth University.

11. The college should emancipate itself from quasi-commercialized programs of athletics, an expensive and often anti-intellectual pastime.

12. The college should reduce to a minimum the elective feature in its curriculum; for one of the college's principle virtues is its recognition of order and hierarchy in the higher learning, and the undergraduate ordinarily is not yet capable of judging with discretion what his course of studies ought to be.

13. The college should recall the importance of furnishing society with a body of tolerably well-educated persons whose function it is to provide right reason and conscience in the commonwealth.

14. The college should inculcate in its students a sense of diffuse gratitude toward the generations that have preceded us in time, and a sense of obligation toward the generations yet to be born; it should remind the rising generation that we are part of a great continuity and essence, and that we moderns are only dwarfs mounted upon the shoulders of giants. For this

Kirk's view on the use or non-use of science:

> The primary disciplines ought to be moral philosophy (not the fashionable logical positivism), humane letters (to develop critical power, not mere "appreciation"), rhetoric (perhaps united with humane letters), history (philosophically considered), political economy (not the amorphous rudimentary "sociology" or "social sciences" which afflicts most colleges nowadays), physics and higher mathematics (those being most important for developing the philosophical cast of mind), biological science (also with a view to theory), classical and modern languages and literatures, and perhaps music and the visual arts (these latter being critical and historical studies, not crafts). (Kirk, 1978:302-303).

The following are some general rules suggested by Kirk to be utilized by a prudent college in its work of conservative reform:

1. The college should reaffirm that the end of a liberal education is an ethical consciousness, through which the student is brought to an apprehension of the enduring truths which govern our being, the principles of self-control and the dignity of man.

2. The college should make it clear that this ethical end is sought through an intellectual discipline, exacting in its character, which regards "useless knowledge" as infinitely more valuable than simple utilitarian skills.

3. The college should return to a concise curriculum emphasizing classical literature, languages, moral philosophy, history, the pure sciences, logic, rhetoric, and religious knowledge.

4. The college should turn away from vocationalism, resigning to trade schools and industrial "in-service" training programs that the college never was meant to undertake.

5. The college should set its face against amorphous "survey courses," "general education," and similar substitutes for real intellectual discipline - such a smattering and an inchoate mass of facts produces only a little learning which is a dangerous thing.

> consciousness lies at the heart of a liberal education (Kirk, 1965:56-58).

Kirk was found to have a conservative view on higher education. In terms of the framework, Kirk was found to ascribe to the following concepts: depravity, liberalizing, prescription, elitist, behaviorist and rationalism.

In summary, the critics of higher education have contributed to the discussions and decisions about higher education by noting the frequent citations of the critics in the writing,of others.

> These are the authors who graduate students in higher education read and quote. Their ideas find their way into policy and action documents of various sorts by their influence on the decisions made by the graduate students. Therein lies their chief value. American higher education policy is not established by any single authority. Rather, it evolves as a result of discussions and decisions of many different people until a kind of national consensus is reached. The voices of these critics have added to these discussions and through them to affecting the course of higher education (Kintzer, 1984:99).

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